

Rummaging may turn up a rare find

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—I collect early 20th Century foreign coins. They are common to most people, but I enjoy learning the history behind them. Where could I go to buy such coins in bulk, perhaps by the pound?

D.G., Chicago

A—Visit some coin shops that have "junk boxes" filled with foreign money at cheap prices. Many dealers will reduce their markups even further if you buy a large quantity.

Also, if you're lucky you might find a rarity while rummaging through an assortment of supposedly ordinary foreign coins. Sometimes dealers make mistakes, overlooking a mint mark or a special error variety.

Q—The "S" mint mark on one of my 1970-S nickels is near the rim; on the other coin, it's closer to the date and [Jefferson's] braid. Should I make retirement plans?

C.L., Chicago

A—No! Government engravers place mint marks on most coin dies by hand; thus, minor variations in the location of mint letters are entirely normal. Your coins have no special value as collectibles.

Q—What's the metal composition of newly minted dimes and quarters?

T.U., Chicago

A—The coins have outer layers of 25 percent nickel and 75 percent copper bonded to an inner core of pure copper. Overall, the composition is 91.67 percent copper and 8.33 percent nickel.

● Members of the Oak Forest Coin Club will appraise old coins—free of charge—during the club's annual show next Sunday. Hours are 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Alsip Holiday Inn, 5000 W. 127th St. Also, up to 25 dealers will sell numismatic collectibles at the show. Admission is free.